WAS JESUS CHRIST A FLESH EATER OR A VEGETARIAN?

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PART I

Jesus Christ, the world thinks, was a Jew. Who were the Jews? A very learned Jew of Damascus region informed Aristotle in the 4th century B.C., that the Jewish people originally emigrated from India. It was stated in my articles in the Press that the working out of this information given to Aristotle showed the Jews to have been South Indian emigrants. Palestine therefore was an Indian colony and Jesus Christ a Tamilian. In India both flesh and vegetarian diet are partaken by the people. What food did Jesus take—flesh or vegetable? To answer this question, one must know something of his life. What do we know about it?

The Kammalars of South India consider themselves superior to Brahmans; they call themselves Visvakarma Brahmanas and are vegetarians. According to the Canonical Bible Jesus was a carpenter's son and he was called Hannozeri in the Talmud. The latter part of the term Hannozeri is the same

as the Sanscrit Achar and the Tamil Asari. Now according to the Apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew Jesus's maternal great grand-father's name was Achar. Achar means Teacher, Guru and it is a title borne by the Kammalars of South India. So both on the paternal and on the maternal side Jesus was a Kammalar. That is inference No. 1.

In a lecture called "Was Jesus Christ a Visva-karma Brahmana?" delivered at Madras in August 1926 under the auspices of the Madras Teachers' Guild, I said that John's Baptism of Jesus on the banks of the Jordon was different from the ordinary Christian Baptism. What function is the latter one then? Now Jesus put on Phylacteries (Sacred thread) in his twelfth year (age fixed for Vaisias in Hindu Sacred books) in the temple at the Sabbath of Phylacteries (Upanayanam) and as a result of it he became a Son of the Law (Brahmachari) and his questioning and answering the doctors in sacred lore in the temple then was his Adhyayanam. Sacred thread, Upanayanam, Brahmacharyam and Adhyayanam connote a second birth. Jesus had a second birth at his twelfth year, when he donned Phylacteries at the temple. And it was upon the necessity of this second birth that Jesus instructed Nicodemus (John I. 1-21) with the words "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God," "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God,"

"Ye must be born again." Jesus was a twice-born person and he wanted his followers to be born again and the followers of Jesus follow the injunction of their Master in this matter. The ordinary Christian Baptism is a Western adaptation of the Hindu Upanayanam. In Indian Upanayanam Brahmopadesam is taught only by word of mouth and it should be kept secret. That was why in early Christian Baptism the Creed was delivered to the initiate only by word of mouth and it was kept secret (1). At the time of Upanayanam the Indian boy is given Panchagavyam to eat. That was why again, the baptised one of early Christianity partook of milk, water and honey (2). That is why yet again Schoff in his valuable notes to his edition of the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea (3) says that the Mateb cord of Abyssinean Christianity is a survival of the Hindu Sacred thread (Yagnyopvitham). Jesus became a Brahmachari in his twelfth year. Brahmacharyam entails a strict disciplined spiritual life. Jesus had a spiritual training. That is inference No. 2.

Did Jesus marry after finishing his spiritual course? No. After leading a spiritual student's life for eighteen years, he was baptised by John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordon. John's Baptism of Jesus was not Upanayanam but the bestowal of Sanyasam by John. That is why Jesus is sometimes represented in ancient Christian

Sacred art in red clothing, with a stick and with a bowl in hand. The red clothing is Kashaya vasthram, the stick is the Sanyasi's Dandam and the bowl in hand is the mendicant's begging bowl. Jesus turned a Sanyasi in his thirtieth year. Sanyasam was his profession. That is inference No. 3.

Soon after Baptism Jesus went into the wilderness to fast, to pray and to be tempted. In the wilderness Jesus was tempted by Satan with power, wealth and such other things. In certain of the later European pictures some of the later saints are portrayed as being tempted by Satan in the form of women during their austerities. Since Christianity was a Tamil Reformer's sect, the European representation of the temptation of Christian devotees by women is nothing more than the Hindu idea of the temptation of Rishis by Apsarases. Jesus's going to the wilderness, after Baptism by John, is his going to Tapovanam for the performance of Tapas for further self-purification and strength. Jesus did not stay for ever in the wilderness like the hill-flower that blooms and withers on the mountain top perfuming the wild air ; but like Gautama Buddha of old, he came back into the world to work actively for its denizens. A Sanyasi's service to humanity was his occupation. That is inference No. 4.

Gregory Nazianzen (Orat. 12) regarded "dirty and tangled hair, naked feet, in imitation of the Apos-

tles" and "a scanty mantle as some of the principal characteristics of a monk"(4). Josephus in describing an anchorite (Bani I think) of Palestine, says that he wore bark of trees. This is the Sanscrit Valkala and the Tamil Mara-uri. John the Baptist is said to have worn a mantle of hair-cloth (Matt. III. 4). The word used for hair-cloth is Kamylu (5). It is our Kambala (woollen clothing). Jesus himself in his instructions given in Matt. X expressly ordered his disciples not to carry more than one mantle for the body and not to wear sandals.

"Dirty and tangled hair" mentioned by Gregory Nazianzen as one of the characteristics of a monk was a peculiarity of a Nazarite. The Book of Numbers (Ch. VI) of the Old Testament prescribes the rules of a Nazarite. A Nazarite was a man dedicated to God, who never drank wine and whose head razor never touched. He allowed his hair to grow and the rolls of uncut hair on the head were looked upon as "Crown of God upon his head" (6). 'Nazarite' the Biblical expression represents the Sanscrit terms Dikshita and Jatadhara and the Tamil Sadayandi. Jesus was a Nazarite and as such he was what is called in South India a Pandaram. His mother also was dedicated to God. That was why Jesus was called Ben Pandera, son of Pandaram. As a Nazarite he must have been a Jatadhara, must have refrained from wine and must

have led a life of holy peace. The rules of conduct of his professional occupation forbade him from violence. That is inference No. 5.

The whole tenor of conversation between Jesus and certain persons, given in John I. 35-40, as well as others mentioned in the same narrative, indicates that at the time, the abode of Jesus was not a house. We read that after a disputation with the Jews in the temple, "every man went into his own house" but that "Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives and early in the next morning he came again into the temple" (John VII. 53 : VIII. 1, 2). Luke (XXI. 37) apparently speaking of Jesus's regular practice says that "in the day time he was teaching in the temple, and at night he went out and abode in the mount that is called the Mount of Olives." His answer to the scribe "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests : but the son of Man hath not where to lay his head" clearly proves that Jesus had no house, no fixed habitation, no samans, no bed or bedding ; but that he lived and slept on the bare ground, in open air or in some rocky cavern of the hill. From several parts of the Gospels it would appear that Jesus slept during night in some wilderness or mountain, whence he walked into some of the adjacent towns or villages in the morning. Although he frequently visited villages and towns, yet it would appear from the Gospel narratives, that he spent most of

his time in mountains and wildernesses and that it was in such places that he performed by far the greatest number of his miracles. Into these secluded places he was followed by vast multitudes who remained with him for several days : their food being (miraculously) provided to them by Jesus. God-intoxicated men who abandon their all and wander are called in India, Parivrajakas : Heaven is their home and earth is their sojourn. The foregoing facts would show that Jesus sojourned in the world a Parivrajaka living in Asramams and in Guhas. Such abodes of Parivrajakas could still be seen in Tiruvannamalai in N. Arcot district and in the Western Ghauts near Courtallam, Tenkasi and Papanasam in Tinnevely district. Jesus led the strict homeless ascetic life of a Parivrajaka. That is inference No. 6.

"But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also" taught Jesus to the world. Beautiful as a wind-blown flower from heaven. "Verily verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" taught Jesus again to the world. Were these mere precepts ? "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," said Jesus again when the hour came in his own case o put precept into practice and mounting the

Cross to show to the world what Ahimsa was, he died praying to God to forgive his murderers in those unforgetable words "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" Ecce homo. Peaceful courage is a quality of the soul, not of the body. It was Poet Shelley I think, that has said in his recently discovered book on Politics that men whose profession it is to fight with deadly weapons become struck with awe when they meet a courageously unresisting foe. No wonder the Roman captain of the guards whose misfortune it was to keep watch over him was struck to the heart and said "Truly this man was a son of God." Such were the beautiful guiding principles and nature of that angel of peace, whom Europe barbarously crucified two thousand years ago to throw him into oblivion. That is inference No. 7.

To summarise. Jesus Christ was a Kammala Rishi, Sittar, Sanyasi or Pandaram, who lived, worked and died the truest of true Parivrajakas. His parentage, training, profession, occupation, rules of conduct of his profession and occupation and guiding principles and nature forbade him from shedding blood. Would such a man ever have allowed his body to have been nurtured upon flesh got by slaughtering dumb and innocent animals that are incapable of defending or protecting themselves—however palatable their flesh might be to the tongue? Commonsense will tell us, not

once but thrice, that this was impossible. But commonsense is so very uncommon now and we have somehow persuaded ourselves to think that Jesus was an eater of flesh. But what evidence is there in the New Testament to support such a conclusion, it may be asked ?

Some of the immediate followers of Jesus are called the Apostles. They preached and practised what their Master taught them. Let us work backwards and begin with them. What do they say on the subject ? St. Paul was one of the greatest of the Apostles. In his Epistle to the Romans (XIV. 21) he says " It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended or is made weak." People who are strict vegetarians sometimes eat flesh in religious functions like Yagnams. Even in the matter of eating God's oblations says he again in the I. Epistle to the Corinthians (VIII. 13) " Wherefore if meat make my brother offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." As regards wine Paul says to Timothy (I. Timothy, V. 23) as a special case, " Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." Who will not recognise in this a medical advice ? The Acts of the Apostles (XV. 20, 29 : XXI. 25) also advocates abstention from things strangled and from blood. Such were the

views of the Apostles on dietary matters. These show that they were vegetarians and teetotalers—at least after conversion. If they preached and practised what their Master taught them, what should have been the diet of the Master? Evidence is not lacking to show what food Jesus took.

PART II

Now Jesus is said to have "sat at meat" or "sat down to meat" at the houses of Matthew (Matt. IX. 10 : Mark II. 15 : Luke V. 29), Simon Leper (Matt. XXVI. 7 : Mark XIV. 3), Martha (Luke X. 37 : John XII. 2) and Pharisee Simon (Luke VII. 36). The term 'meat' occurring in these references is an obsolete word meaning food of any kind. The People's Bible Encyclopædia (p. 690) in commenting upon 'meat' observes "This word does not appear to be used in the Bible in the sense of animal food, which is denoted uniformly by flesh." We have not the slightest reason therefore to infer that at any of these houses he ever took a flesh meal.

Although the scrutinising Scribes and Pharisees said that Jesus was a glutton and a wine bibber : accused him of eating with publicans, of eating with unwashed hands, and of having disciples that fasted not like the more strictly monkish followers of John : yet they never charged him

with being a flesh-eater. The Greek word used for glutton is Phagos derived from Bagos, a piece of bread (7). The punctilious Pharisees expected to see monkery in its perfection exhibited by Jesus. Probably he ate more freely than some of his contemporary monks who fasted for several days and did not take much when they broke their fast. Jesus's gluttony, if gluttony it was, implied nothing more than that he ate bread, not flesh. As a Nazarite Jesus would not have touched wine and the charge will be shown later on to be unfounded.

Indeed it is bread (Gr. Artos) which is almost invariably mentioned as the food that he and his disciples took, whether by themselves in the wilderness or in the houses of those who invited and entertained them. Eg. Matt. XV. 2 : Mark III. 20 : VII. 2-5 : Luke XIV. 1 : John VI. 23.

Homeless wanderers cannot be punctilious about their food. They must eat whatever they can get or find, flesh or vegetable. But what did Jesus do ? When, in coming from Bethany he was hungry, although Jerusalem with its luxuries was close at hand, yet like a true Sanyasi subsisting solely on the spontaneous productions of the forest, he went to look for food on a fig tree (Matt. XXI. 18, 19 : Mark XI. 12, 13). The Apostles also acted likewise for Luke (VI. 1) says that on some other occasion "his followers plucked the ears of corn and did eat rubbing them in their hands." This habit

may still be seen in our rural parts to-day and it is called in Tamil கதிரை கசக்கிக் கொரிக்கிறது.

Matt. XIV. 15-21 : Mark VI. 35-44 : Luke IX. 12-17 : Matt. XV. 32-38 : and John VI. 5-13 describe the Vana-bojanams that Jesus gave to the people. On these occasions with a few fishes and loaves of bread he is said to have fed to satiety thousands of people by miraculously multiplying the fishes and loaves. This miraculous multiplication itself is a reminiscence of a Hindu idea. Compare Kamadhenu of Vashishta and the proverbial Akshaya-patram of India. That is only by the way. To proceed with our discussion. If Jesus was a Vegetarian, how will I explain the introduction of fish here, it may be asked. In the first place the verses show Jesus to ask only for bread and not for fish. When that is so, why should the Apostles be reported as saying that fish too is available. I have my own doubts about the introduction of fish in the passages of the text—they may be later interpolations. In the second place even if fish was actually purveyed, it might have been at the instance of the Apostles to suit the habits of the multitude gathered there. In the third place the narratives do not give the slightest hint that Jesus or the disciples ate fish then. When Jesus and his followers did not touch flesh previously, why should it be presumed that they ate it at this particular time, when the verses do not say so ?

It may be said that at his last supper Jesus must have partaken flesh. Descriptions of this supper will be found in Matt. XXVI. 17-30: Mark XIV. 12-26 : Luke XXII. 7-39 : John XIII. 1-17. Now what are the facts ? Jesus sent two of his disciples to an inn (a Matam probably in Jerusalem) previously to arrange for the supper. In the evening he and his disciples went there and sat down to eat. As they ate, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and giving the broken bread to the disciples said "Take, eat, this is my body." He then took a cup, blessed it and gave it to them to share it among themselves saying "This is the blood of the new covenant which is shed for many." After supper was over they sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives. I have stated facts very briefly omitting two important items—feet-washing (John XIII. 5) and the dipping of the hands into the dish (Matt. XXVI. 23 : Mark XIV. 20).

The Paschal lamb was the principal feature of the Feast of Passover. But in the narratives of the four Gospel writers on the subject—although they materially differ from one another in their statements—there is not a word about the presence of a cooked lamb at the supper or about eating it then. If Jesus had it before him, it is very reasonable to suppose, that he would have said something about it, just as he said about the bread and the cup. He would have said about the lamb, instead of the

bread "This is my body." The Greek word "Soma" rendered "body" really means corpse (8). The cooked lamb, in this instance, therefore, would have been a much better subject for this supposed metaphor than the bread, especially, if—as Christians contend—the Paschal lamb eaten under the Mosaic economy, was a type of him and his sufferings, and also if John used a proper metaphor when he called Jesus, the Lamb of God. Apart from these, if theological writers are correct in telling us that Jesus and his Apostles did eat a lamb at this supper and that this supper was instituted for eucharistic purposes, and intended to be of a sacrificial character, representing the sacrifice offered by Jesus on the Cross, it is strangely inconsistent of the Christians of the present age not to celebrate the Lord's supper with a lamb, as well as with bread and wine. It will thus be seen that in whatever manner and with whatever food the Jews were accustomed to celebrate the Passover, the Gospels do not afford an iota of evidence to indicate that Jesus and his followers had a lamb for food at this supper.

The fact is this. The supper in question was not in celebration of the traditional Passover: it was meant for the passover of his own soul to the other world. Jesus in other words instituted it as a Sraddham for himself even when he was alive. It was because Jesus meant the function to be a

Sraddham for himself, that he said "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke XXII. 19 : I. Cor. XI. 24); that he did not follow the ritual of the customary Passover on the occasion and introduced the feet-washing (Padaprakshalanam) and the dipping of the hands into the dish. Ancient pictures alone of the Last Supper reveal the true import of the textual reference to the dipping of the hands into the dish. It is the dipping of the linked hands of the performer and the eater of the Indian Sraddha offering over the repast at the time of uttering the Manthram "Idam idam Havyam etc." No dog should enter the place of of Sraddham in India. Since the Lord's supper is Srad dha ceremony, Archbishop Laud raised rails in the church to prevent dogs from getting in (9). Since the Last Supper was not in celebration of the traditional Passover, the Paschal lamb does not find a place in the narratives, because it was not there. So Jesus did not take flesh-meat on this occasion either.

Luke XXIV. 42: John XXI. 12, 13 : Luke XXIV. 30 and Mark XVI. 14 alone remain to be examined. Of these four references, the first says that Jesus ate broiled fish, the second notes that he gave fish and bread to his followers, the third tells us that he broke bread and gave it to them and the fourth simply remarks that Jesus appeared when his disciples were eating and upbraided them. So

in the whole of the New Testament, the only reference of a direct kind to Jesus's eating flesh of any kind—fish, is in Luke XXIV. 42.

All the references given by me from the Bible do not reveal Jesus as eating flesh or fish during his lifetime. The four references just mentioned relate to his appearance after death on the Cross. The bodily resurrection of Christ is a matter of faith. The Christians believe in it and the non-Christians do not. Whether the resurrection of Jesus was true or not, let me ask the reader in all sincerity, that if he, while in Sthula sariram, did not partake of flesh or fish in all his ante-mortem dinners, why should we believe that he tasted broiled fish only in one solitary post-mortem dinner, while in Sukshma sariram? The idea is absurd: the volume of evidence is against it: there is some thing wrong somewhere.

Before concluding let me say a few words on an unconnected but somewhat relevant question. Did Jesus take wine at the Last Supper? Before answering this question let me go back to an earlier time. Jesus is said to have turned water into wine at a marriage feast in Cana (John II. 1-11). W. B. Crickmer notes "The blood of the grape" as a meaning of the word wine in his "Greek Testament Englished" (p. 155. fn.) Grape juice was probably the true meaning of the word understood as wine in subsequent times. If this is correct

Jesus must have turned water, not into wine but into grape-juice. Whatever that may be, leaving aside the question how far miracles are possible, the Biblical verses do not state that Jesus or his Apostles drank wine at the marriage feast. Coming now to the Last Supper what do we find? The A. V. has in Matt. XXVI. 29: Mark XIV. 25 and in Luke XXII. 18 "fruit of the vine." Fruit of the vine does not necessarily mean the intoxicating liquid. A reference made to W. B. Crickmer's aforesaid book again tells us that "juice of the vine" is the more correct translation. In these circumstances we are justified in presuming that the liquid that Jesus gave to his disciples to drink at the Last Supper was not wine but grape-juice, Draksha rasam. But even this Draksha rasam, as Dummelow's One Volume Bible Commentary (p. 766) remarks Jesus did not drink.

Jesus as a Nazarite would not have drunk wine, but might have drunk grape-juice and might have been even fond of it. The Pharisees' charge of Jesus being a wine-bibber, like their charge of gluttony must be either dismissed as unfounded or as being due to his probable fondness for grape-juice, Draksha rasam. The popular notion that Jesus drank wine at the marriage feast at Cana or at his last supper is without foundation.

In conclusion it may be stated that evidence cited by me may be divided into two classes—

those relating to natural occasions and those relating to super-natural occasions. Fish and wine are not mentioned on natural occasions as having been partaken by Jesus. They are brought in as items of menu only in narratives relating to supernatural occasions—turning water into wine at the marriage at Cana, multiplication of fishes and loaves at the feeding of the four thousand and the five thousand and the post-mortem dinner of Jesus after resurrection from the grave. This difference is an important point to note and this fact itself goes to support my contention. The cold climate of Europe is probably responsible for the introduction of these two items of menu into the holy text and the popular notion that Jesus ate flesh and drank wine. But the evidence adduced by me from the Bible itself completely proves that Jesus tasted none of these things.

NOTE.

The word "bread" is used in the Bible in a wide sense. Biblical bread and loaves were not like modern European bread. A perusal of the article on bread in the People's Bible Encyclopaedia will show that Biblical bread was more like Indian Dosai, Idli (both flat and kodalai type), Vadai and Chappati.

Authorities quoted.

(1) Rev. Warren. Prayer-book Commentary, p. 60.

(2) Duchesne. Christian Worship, pp. 315-335.

(3) Schoff. Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, p. 139.

(4) E. P. Meredith. The Prophet of Nazareth, p. 531.

(5) The People's Bible Encyclopaedia, p. 180.

(6) The People's Bible Encyclopaedia, Art. Nazarite.

(7) E. P. Meredith. The Prophet of Nazareth, p. 524, fn.

(8) W. B. Crickmer. The Greek Testament Englished, p. 50, fn.

(9) Rev. Stephens. Helps to the Study of the Book of Common Prayer. p. 141.

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